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# The Hero's Transformation

Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals

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Stories of heroes undergoing significant transformations are as old as stories themselves. The first known mythical narrative in Western literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, tells the tale of Gilgamesh, the great demigod ruler of Uruk who revels in his invincibility. Gilgamesh terrorizes a city, kills the guardian of a forest, spurns the goddess of love, and slays the mighty bull of heaven. He is reckless, ruthless, and arrogant. Through his friendship with Enkidu and later by his recognition of his own mortality, Gilgamesh experiences loss, becomes humbled, and acquires wisdom about life and love. His personal growth as a hero establishes the precedent of transformation in hero stories, inspiring the development of hero characters in countless fictional tales for over 4,000 years. From Gilgamesh to Luke Skywalker, from Odysseus to Jane Eyre, heroes set out on a journey, transform into new and improved versions of themselves, and in the process encourage us all to follow in their footsteps.

In this chapter, we provide an analysis of human transformation in heroic storytelling and in the lives of everyday people. We describe what a transformation is, why it is important, what causes it to happen, and how it varies from hero to hero. We argue that the hero's transformation is the most central yet most overlooked component of the monomyth of the hero as described by Joseph Campbell (1949) in his classic volume, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Our chapter discusses the ways in which the hero's journey parallels various stages of healthy human development, during which people undergo moral, mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical transformations. We will describe the many triggers, dimensions, processes, and consequences of the hero's transformation. Our concluding thoughts will focus on the role of the hero's transformation in the personal development of the hero and for the well-being of society.

## Pervasiveness of Transformation

Transformation is ubiquitous in the natural world. In zoology, the phenomenon of *metamorphosis* describes the radical change from tadpole to frog, caterpillar to butterfly, and polyp to jellyfish. Evolutionary biologists have identified two types of transformations of species: *phyletic gradualism* describes the slow transformation of one species into a new one, and *punctuated gradualism* describes sudden evolutionary shifts.

Similarly, geologists have distinguished between slow, incremental changes in the earth, called *uniformitarianism*, and rapid, violent changes, called *catastrophism*. In the material world, *physical transformations* refer to changes in physical properties that do not produce new substances, as

when water transforms to steam or to ice. *Chemical transformations* produce new substances, as when photosynthesis leads to the production of a different set of chemical substances. In climatology, a *tipping point* refers to the irreversible instant at which the earth shifts from one stable state (e.g., an ice age) to another. Once a tipping point has been reached, a transition to a new state occurs. These examples of transformative events in the natural world suggest that transformations vary along the dimensions of speed, type, depth, and timing.

In the social world, transformation is also pervasive. Societies and cultures form, undergo internal change, and dissolve. Transformation is implicated in most of the stages of Tuckman's (1965) classic model describing group development as *forming, storming, norming, and performing*. As changes in biological organisms can either be constructive (e.g., mitosis) or destructive (e.g., cancer), so can changes within social entities. Positive transformative movements in collectives promote healthy growth and social unity, as evidenced by the feminist movement, civil rights movement, gay rights movement, and myriad other unifying crusades. Destructive collective transformations exclude and damage segments of populations; examples include Hitler's *Final Solution*, Pol Pot's *Khmer Rouge*, and the massacre of indigenous populations in Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas. Revolutions abound in the political world, with coups aimed at either expanding human rights or dismantling them (Wasserstrom, Hunt, & Young, 2000). Subcultures within larger cultural systems also undergo transformations. These subcultural upheavals can have enduring transformative effects on the greater culture as a whole. Examples include the revolutions that have occurred in the areas of technology (Bostrom, 2006), science (Kuhn, 1962), healthcare (Lee & Cosgrove, 2014), transportation (Crouch, 2004), and music (Reising, 2002), to name but a few.

Psychological transformations have long piqued the interest of scholars and are a central impetus for heroic growth in individuals. Two early seminal works that addressed psychological transformation were William James' (1902/2013) discussion of spiritual conversion in his classic volume, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and Sigmund Freud's (1905/2011) *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which described life-altering transformative events in childhood. Although Freud suggested that people resist change in adulthood, all subsequent major schools of psychological thought have since proposed mechanisms for transformative change throughout the lifespan. Humanistic theories, in particular, have embraced the idea that humans are capable of a long-term transformation into self-actualized individuals (Maslow, 1943). Recent theories of self-processes portray humans as open to change and growth under some conditions (Sedikides & Hepper, 2009) but resistant under others (Swann, 2012). The current positive psychology movement is now carrying the mantle of illuminating the mechanisms underlying healthy transformative growth in humans (Lopez & Snyder, 2011).

## The Mythic Hero's Transformation

Ironically, the founder of heroism science, Joseph Campbell, was not a trained scientist at all but a comparative mythologist who noticed "a certain typical hero sequence of actions which can be detected in stories from all over the world and from many periods in history" (Campbell, 1988, p. 166). Campbell's genius lay in his ability to recognize the complex psychological origins and consequences of the mythic hero's journey. The hero's transformation is one such consequence, and for Campbell it was the centerpiece of the journey. According to Campbell, hero myths "grab you somewhere down inside" and "inspire the possibility of the realization of your perfection, the fullness of your strength" (Campbell, 1988, p. 183). Myths "provide a field in which you can locate yourself" (Campbell, 2004, p. xvi) and they "carry the individual through the stages of life" (p. 9). The resultant transformations seen in heroic tales "are infinite in their revelation" (Campbell, 1988, p. 183). Campbell cites Otto Rank's (1909) observation that "everyone is a hero in birth, where he undergoes a tremendous psychological as well as physical

transformation, from the condition of a little water creature living in a realm of amniotic fluid into an air-breathing mammal" (p. 153). This transformation at birth is prescient; it foreshadows a lifetime of transformative journeys for human beings.

### *Defining the Hero's Transformation*

Campbell (1949) described the monomyth of the hero in this way: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (p. 30). This description of the journey points to three distinct transformations: A transformation of *setting*, a transformation of *self*, and a transformation of *society*. The sequence is critical, with each transformation essential for producing the next one. Without a change in setting, the hero cannot change herself, and without a change in herself, the hero cannot change the world. Our focus here is on the hero's transformation of the self, but this link in the chain necessarily requires some consideration of the links preceding and following it. The mythic hero *must* be cast out of her familiar world and into a different world, otherwise there can be no departure from her status quo. Once transformed, the hero *must* use her newly enriched state to better the world, otherwise the hero's transformation is bereft of social significance.

The hero's transformation is essential for the hero to achieve her goal on the journey. During the quest, "ineffable realizations are experienced" and "things that before had been mysterious are now fully understood" (Campbell, 1972, p. 219). The ineffability of these new insights stems from their unconscious origins. Jungian principles of the collective unconscious form the basis of Campbell's theorizing about hero mythology. As Le Grice (2013) notes, "myths are expressions of the imagination, shaped by the archetypal dynamics of the psyche" (p. 153). As such, the many recurring elements of the mythic hero's journey have their "inner, psychological correlates" (Campbell, 1972, p. 153). The hero's journey is rife with social symbols and motifs that connect the hero to her deeper self, and these unconscious images must be encountered, and conflicts with them must be resolved, to bring about transformation (Campbell, 2004). Ultimately, the hero's outer journey reflects an inner, psychological journey that involves "leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or mature condition" (Campbell, 1988, p. 152).

### *Purpose of the Hero's Transformation*

When people embark on the hero's journey, they "undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness," requiring them "to think a different way" (Campbell, 1988, p. 155). This shift provides a new "a map or picture of the universe and allows us to see ourselves in relationship to nature" (Campbell, 1991, p. 56). Buddhist traditions and twelve-step programs of recovery refer to transformation as an awakening. In a similar manner, Campbell (2004) described the journey's purpose as a much-needed voyage designed to "wake you up" (p. 12). Below we offer five reasons why transformation is such a key element in the hero's journey:

- 1 Transformations foster developmental growth. Early human societies recognized the value of initiation rituals in promoting the transition from childhood to adulthood (van Gennep, 1909). A number of scholars, including Campbell, have lamented the failure of our postmodern society to recognize the psychological importance of rites and rituals (Campbell, 1988; Le Grice, 2013; Rohr, 2011). Coming-of-age stories are common in mythic hero tales about children "awakening to the new world that opens at adolescence" (Campbell, 1988, p. 167). The hero's journey "helps us pass through and deal with the

- various stages of life from birth to death” (Campbell, 1991, p. 56). Recent research affirms Campbell’s assertions about the developmental significance of transformational rites of passage. Imber-Black and Roberts (1998), for example, found that transformative rituals help children learn how to build relationships and distinguish fantasy from reality. In addition, Norton and Gino (2014) have shown that rites and rituals help people gain a sense of control, mitigate negative emotional states, and grow into mature individuals.
- 2 Transformations promote healing. We have argued elsewhere (Allison & Goethals, 2014, 2016) that the simple act of sharing stories about hero transformations can deliver many of the same benefits as group therapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). These benefits include the instillation of hope; the relief of knowing that others share one’s emotional experiences; the fostering of self-awareness; the relief of stress; and the development of a sense of meaning about life. A growing number of clinical psychologists invoke hero transformations in their practice to help their clients develop the heroic traits of strength, resilience, and courage (Grace, 2015). Recent research on *post-traumatic growth* demonstrates that people can overcome severe trauma and even use it to transform themselves into stronger, healthier persons than they were before the trauma (Ramos & Leal, 2013). In biology, there are numerous examples of transformative healing. The phenomenon of *neurogenesis* refers to the development of new brain cells in the hippocampus through exercise, diet, meditation, and learning. This transformative healing and growing can occur even after catastrophic brain trauma. Efthimiou (Chapter 8, this volume) discusses how the hero organism can engage in *regeneration* or *restoration* processes, referring to an organism’s ability to grow, heal, and re-create itself. Researchers have recently identified the *Wolverine* gene, which one day will allow people to re-grow lost limbs (Efthimiou, 2015). Medical researchers have also developed methods for transforming leukemia cells into leukemia-killing immune cells, thus ridding patients of cancer (Andrews, 2015). Moreover, the practice of meditation and mindfulness has been found to produce neurobiological changes, such as healthier functioning of the lateral prefrontal cortex, reduced inflammation, and faster recovery from the physical effects of stress (Renter 2014).
  - 3 Transformations cultivate social unity. Campbell (1972) argued that hero transformations “drop or lift [heroes] out of themselves, so that their conduct is not their own but of the species, the society” (p. 57). He cites an essay written in 1840 by philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who observed that the transformed individual has moved “from the lesser, secondary knowledge of himself as separate from others” to “the greater, truer truth, that we are all one in the ground of our being” (p. 151). The transformed hero is “selfless, boundless, without ego.” Campbell called this new way of thinking a “metaphysically valid insight” (p. 151). In tribal societies, initiation rituals serve as heroes journeys designed to unify novices and elders into a single whole. These rituals often include “a special mutilation which varies with the tribe (a tooth is removed, the penis is incised, etc.) and which makes the novice forever identical with the adult members” (van Gennep, 1909, p. 75). The most meaningful transformations are a journey from egocentricity to sociocentricity, from elitism to egalitarianism (Campbell, 1949; Rohr, 2011; Wilber, 2007). No longer isolated from the world, transformed individuals enjoy a feeling of union with others. Describing the hero’s journey, Campbell (1949) wrote, “where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world” (p. 25).
  - 4 Transformations advance society. The culmination of the hero’s journey is the hero’s boon, or gift, to society. This gift is what separates the hero’s journey from simply being a test of personal survival. For the voyage to be heroic, the protagonist in myth must use her newly acquired insights and gifts to better the world (Campbell, 1949; Rohr, 2011). The heroic boon to society follows the successful completion of the individual quest, and so we can say that the social boon is entirely dependent upon the hero’s personal transformation that

made the personal quest a success. Hero mythology, according to Campbell (1972), is designed to teach us that society is not a “perfectly static organization” but represents a “movement of the species forward” (p. 48). During the process of experiencing personal transformation, the hero obtains the “elixir” that empowers and enables her to help guide others on their personal transformative journeys. This idea is consistent with contemporary theories of leadership that focus on the role of enlightened leaders to transform their followers, elevating them toward greater levels of motivation and morality (e.g., Burns, 1978, 2003).

- 5 Transformations deepen spiritual and cosmic understanding. Campbell (1988) observed that the hero's transformation involves learning “to experience the supernormal range of human spiritual life” (p. 152). Myths, he said, “bring us into a level of consciousness that is spiritual” (p. 19). In every hero tale, the hero must “die spiritually” and then be “reborn to a larger way of living” (p. 141), a process that is the enactment of a universal spiritual theme of death being the necessary experience for producing new life (Campbell, 1991, p. 102). Many people report being “born again” by religious conversion to Christ or to Buddha (Lee, 2014). Hero transformations may also supply cosmological wisdom. Ethnographer van Gennep (1909) observed that transformative rituals in early human tribes have “been linked to the celestial passages, the revolutions of the planets, and the phases of the moon. It is indeed a cosmic conception that relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life and, by a sort of pre-scientific divination, joins them to the great rhythms of the universe” (p. 194).

## Ten Dimensions of Transformation

As we have noted, transformations can vary on many dimensions. This observation is consistent with Campbell's (1949) acknowledgement that within and across cultures there are many mythological variations of the hero monomyth. Not all transformative hero journeys contain the same stages, dilemmas, archetypal images, and social dynamics. Below we have assembled a list of 10 dimensions on which hero transformations can vary:

- 1 subject;
- 2 scale;
- 3 speed;
- 4 duration;
- 5 timing;
- 6 direction;
- 7 type;
- 8 depth;
- 9 openness; and
- 10 source.

While other dimensions no doubt exist, we consider these to be among the most important. Below we discuss each of these dimensions in turn.

### *Subject: Hero or Followers*

In the vast majority of hero tales, the protagonist is the primary recipient or target of the heroic transformation. This lone hero is the beneficiary of transformation in hero tales from Beowulf to Harry Potter. In some stories, however, the heroic protagonist remains unchanged throughout the narrative but he or she serves as the catalyst for the transformation in others. Stories of the

leadership accomplishments of Susan B. Anthony, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. are prominent examples of the hero's followers enjoying the fruits of transformation. It is not our claim that Anthony, Gandhi, and King, Jr. failed to undergo a personal transformation themselves. Surely they did. Rather, we observe that some hero stories focus only on the already transformed leader's metamorphic effect on other people.

### *Scale: Individual, Dyad, Group, or Society*

Most hero narratives feature a single individual as the target of transformation. Allison and Smith (2015) have recognized a larger social structure of heroic actors that includes heroes as individuals, dyads, small group ensembles, and large organizations and societies. At times heroic tales feature dyadic heroes as the target of heroic transformation, as seen in stories about Romulus and Remus, Thelma and Louise, and Batman and Robin. The heroic target subject can also be a group or collective, in such as the *Avengers*, the *Monuments Men*, or the *Supremes*. Moreover, as we have noted, an entire organization or society can also serve as the target of the transformative effects of a great individual hero or group of heroes.

### *Speed: Slow or Fast*

Heroic transformations can occur gradually over time, or they can occur with sudden intensity. William James (1902/2013) documented this distinction in his analysis of the varieties of religious conversion. Transformations that occur with great speed appear to be rather rare in real life but are the signature characteristic of heroes in the comic superhero genre. The Incredible Hulk, Wolverine, Ant-Man, and Popeye all enjoy nearly instant physical transformations. In real life, speed is a critical variable in responses to emergency situations that demand a rapid response. A growing body of research on altruism shows that heroic reactions to emergencies occur instantaneously, with any type of deliberative thought actually interfering with the helping behavior (Rand & Epstein, 2014). William James noted that spiritual transformations can occur quickly in the aftermath of crisis situations, or they can unfold gradually over time. There are vast individual differences. Unlike *target* and *scale*, which are discrete variables, the *speed* dimension is best viewed as a continuous variable.

### *Duration: Short-Lived or Long-Lasting*

Transformative effects can be ephemeral in their duration, or they can be longstanding, or even permanent. One might reasonably ask whether an ephemeral transformation is really a transformation at all. Some (potential) heroes may give the impression of change but later demonstrate that change has not occurred. The iconic 1980s television drama *Dallas* featured a villainous character, J. R. Ewing, who repeatedly created the illusion of having been transformed into a heroic character, but inevitably Ewing would revert to his dark ways. Robert Downey, Jr. suffered years of setbacks on his road to recovery from drug addiction before his transformation to sobriety took hold. The character of Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* had long been hailed as a heroic champion of civil rights but the 2015 release of Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* appears to have tainted Finch's reputation. Opinions can often vary about the nature and duration of heroic transformation. St. Augustine's conversion from sinner to saint did not happen overnight and in fact was characterized by many short-lived fits and starts before a permanent change was established. As with the speed dimension, the duration dimension operates as a continuous rather than as a discrete variable.

### *Timing: Early Life or Late Life*

Transformations can occur at any point in life. Early life transformations usually occur in hero stories involving calamitous or severely challenging childhood circumstances, such as those endured by Helen Keller or Malala Yousafzai. At times, people are transformed early in life by extraordinarily positive circumstances, as exemplified by Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, and others who enjoyed instant meteoric career success. Early-life transformations, whether positive or negative, appear to leave the ill-prepared hero vulnerable to a tragic end. Transformations can be triggered by life-changing external events that can occur at any stage of one's life, or by processes of natural human development. Some models of lifespan development propose multiple transformative changes throughout the entire human lifetime (Erikson, 1994). Other models point to one major transformation in mid-life or late in the lifespan (Jung, 1970; Rohr, 2011). Stories from hospice workers suggest that people's most momentous transformation occurs in the days or moments just prior to death, when the dying finally get honest about their lives, their regrets, and their spiritual place in the universe (Callanan & Kelley 2012). This timing dimension of transformation is also best thought of as a continuous variable.

### *Direction: The Four Heroic Arcs*

In every hero narrative, the hero's transformation follows a specific arc or trajectory. Allison and Smith (2015) have identified four distinct transformational arcs of the hero. First, the *classic hero arc* begins with the hero living life as an ordinary individual, and after being thrust into the journey she becomes transformed into a highly moral or competent hero by the story's end. Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* is a prototypical example of a classic arc. Second, the *enlightened hero arc* showcases a character who is villainous at first but who redeems herself by the story's conclusion. Phil Connors in the movie *Groundhog Day* exemplifies this hero arc. A third heroic arc features the *redeemed hero*, who undergoes two transformations. The hero starts out neutral or positive, descends into villainy, but redeems herself in the end. The character of *Maleficent* in the prequel to *Sleeping Beauty* represents a good example of the redeemed arc. The fourth and final heroic arc features no transformation at all; the protagonist begins the journey as a hero and remains heroic throughout the narrative. This non-transformation characterizes the journey of the superhero. Superman, for example, is just as super at the outset of the story as he is at the conclusion.

### *Type: Moral, Emotional, Spiritual, Intellectual, Physical, and Motivational*

Allison and Smith (2015) identified five types of transformations that heroes undergo. These five types of hero transformations extend Turner's (1966) conceptualization of the vast changes that young people undergo during the coming-of-age rituals in tribal societies. The first type is a *moral* transformation. In film, two examples of heroes who experience moral change include *Casablanca*'s Rick Blaine, who must overcome his hardened heart to side with the Allies, and Han Solo in *Star Wars*, whose motives shift from greed to humanitarianism. The second type of transformation is an *emotional* transformation. These refer to transformations of the heart, and they include heroes who, through adversity, grow in courage, resilience, and empathy. An example is Franklin Roosevelt, whose battle with polio transformed him from an aloof, distant figure to a kind, compassionate leader. A third type is a *spiritual* transformation, describing heroes who experience a life-changing conversion in beliefs about God or the universe. Examples include Louis Zamperini's journey in *Unbroken*, Gautama Buddha's path of enlightenment, the first disciples of Jesus, and Moses's journey in *The Ten Commandments*. Fourth, heroes can undergo *intellectual* transformations, featuring a change in mental abilities or fundamental insights about



the world. Coming-of-age stories are excellent examples of such transformations, as in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Ender's Game*.

The fifth type of transformation is a *physical* one, as seen in superhero origin stories in which the hero is an ordinary person until an accident involving exposure to toxins or radiation endows the hero with a superpower. Spiderman, the Hulk, and the Avengers are examples of heroes who undergo physical transformations. Outside the realm of comics, everyday heroes can heroically transform themselves in a physical sense. A notable example is Caitlyn Jenner, whose openness about her transgender procedure helped integrate the LGBTQ community into the mainstream of society. The story of the famous golfer Ben Hogan serves as another real-world example of heroic physical transformation. Hogan suffered grave injuries to his lower body in an automobile accident, and the permanent damage he sustained to his legs actually improved his golf swing and propelled him to achieve greater superstardom. Physical transformations can also precipitate moral transformations, as in the case of Ron Woodroof in the story of the *Dallas Buyers Club*.

Psychologists have only recently begun to understand the link between psychological and physical transformations. Gray (2010) found that people who performed a selfless act actually became physically stronger, demonstrating an embodied component to heroism. Our understanding of physical and genetic transformations is undergoing a revolution (see Carey, 2013). For example, Landers et al. (2009) have identified what they call a *hero gene*, called KIFAP3, which allows sufferers of motor neuron disease to become more resistant to malignant transformation. In this same vein, Shyh-Chang et al. (2013) have identified a type of *superhero gene* called Lin28a, which reverts cells to an embryonic state that allows for the growth of new limbs and organs. Friend and Shadt (2014) have embarked on a *Resilience Project* aimed at identifying unique individuals or “genetic heroes” who have demonstrated exceptional resilience to transformations involving debilitating disease and genetic mutation (Carter, 2014). These and other studies suggest that an epigenetic basis of transformation is becoming a reality (Efthimiou, 2015). The link between the hero’s journey and epigenetic processes is now producing new insights about heroic leadership and embodied dimensions of leadership (Efthimiou, 2016).

In addition to Allison and Smith’s (2015) five transformations, we propose a sixth one: a *motivational* transformation. Events in one’s life can slowly, or often quite suddenly, change one’s entire motivational focus in life. Candace Lightner lost her child in an automobile accident involving an intoxicated driver, motivating her to establish Mothers Against Drunk Driving. John Walsh lost his son to a murderous predator and, motivated to prevent similar tragedies, began hosting the television show *America’s Most Wanted*. Family members who lose loved ones to gun violence often devote their lives to promoting gun control legislation. Tragedies can beget motivational changes in people who heroically use these tragedies to transform entire societies. We suspect there are more than six types of transformations but we offer these six as a starting point for future scholarly discussions.

### *Depth: Shallow or Deep*

As we have suggested, the degree of transformation undergone by a hero can vary from superficial to profound. This dimension can also refer to the depth of information processing shown by the hero before and during the heroic act. Heroes who devote their lives to a noble cause will allocate considerable thought to their heroic actions. These deep thinkers are leaders of important social movements such as Gandhi, Anthony, Mandela, and King, Jr. At the other end of the continuum are heroes who respond instantly to an emergency situation. These individuals will act heroically with little thought. Research by Rand and Epstein (2014) found that “high-stakes extreme altruism may be largely motivated by automatic, intuitive processes” (see also Kraft-Todd & Rand, Chapter 3, this volume). These investigators suggest that heroic acts may spring from people’s tendency to overgeneralize their pattern of helping in lower-stake

settings to higher-stake settings. Bystanders with the courage to intervene may have cultivated a helping response “as an automatic default, which then sometimes gets applied in atypical settings where helping is extreme costly.”

### *Openness: Motivation and Ability*

We propose that for heroic transformation to take place, a hero must possess the *ability* to change, and sometimes, but not necessarily, the *motivation* to change. This idea is consistent with conceptions of the mythic hero as an individual who is either reluctant or compelled to go on the hero's journey against her will (Campbell, 1949; Peck, 2003; Rohr, 2011). Examples of reluctant heroes abound. Stephen Hawking was forced by ALS to undergo a life-altering transformation. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy's understanding of home is only made possible after she is swept by a tornado into the Land of Oz. The conversion of Paul the Apostle occurs after he is pitched off his horse by a blinding light. When children in tribal societies reach a certain age, they are thrown into rituals of adulthood whether they want to or not (Turner, 1966). In all these examples, people undergo change only because they are forced by circumstances beyond their control.

Some heroes, of course, do choose to go on the hero's journey. For example, Siddhartha voluntarily leaves the comforts of his castle to seek spiritual illumination. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins freely decides to join the thirteen dwarves on their quest to reclaim their mountain. Odysseus decides to fight in the Trojan War and afterward desires to sail home to Ithaca. Throughout history, people have expressed their motivation for transformative change in poetry and in song lyrics, as when country crooner Billy Joe Shaver sang that he was an old piece of coal who aspired to become a diamond (“I’m just an old chunk of coal,” 1981). Aspirations for positive change are vocalized by myriad artists such as Johnny Cash in “Folsom Prison Blues,” Kelly Clarkson in “Stronger,” George Harrison in “Here Comes the Sun,” and Martha K. Lankton in “Just a Closer Walk with Thee.” Deliberate changes in one's life trajectory usually begin with this motivation to change. Obstacles to such motivation can include an ignorance that one's current non-heroic life needs changing (Campbell, 1949); a slothful laziness about doing what it takes to change (Peck, 2003); a narcissism in one's personality makeup that thwarts any desire to change (Scott, 2012); and even birth-order effects that render first-borns less motivated to take heroic risks compared to later-borns (Sulloway & Zeigenhaft, 2010).

Psychological defenses may underlie people's resistance to going on the transformative journey. Jung (1956) described the *shadow* as the dark, unknown aspects of our personalities that prevent us from transforming into our full potential. According to Campbell (1988), “all of these wonderful poetic images of mythology are referring to something in you,” and that your shadow impedes your transformation “when your mind is simply trapped by the image out there so that you never make the reference to yourself” (p. 68). The shadow is “represented as the monster that has to be overcome, the dragon” (Campbell, 2004, p. 73). Although “the shadow is the landfill of the self,” it also “holds great potentialities in you” because, if one is fortunate, dark energies build up to the point of *enantiodromia*: a dramatic expression of the shadow as its opposite, an expression so vivid that denial of the shadow is cracked and transformation, however painful, results. Campbell calls this illumination of the shadow an “unheeded demon” that comes “roaring up into the light” (p. 73). The *golden shadow*, moreover, consists of positive aspects of the self, also buried in our unconscious, that we project onto others as hero worship. As we bring the content of our positive and negative shadows into the light, we are transformed. People who undergo such change must have both the motivation and the ability to do so, often through psychotherapy.

Both motivation and ability are often necessary for many transformative life changes to occur. Maslow's (1943) model of hierarchical needs suggests that people can get stuck at lower stages of

the hierarchy that focus on the fulfillment of basic biological and security needs. Heroic potential may be suppressed when individuals are afflicted by poverty or safety concerns that prevent their ability to progress upward in the hierarchy toward higher-level goals. Moreover, transformative change may be impossible if people lack the ability to show resilience in the face of adversity (Seligman, 2011b), or if people are unable to derive meaning from adverse circumstances (Frankl, 1946). Another obstacle to one's ability to transform may reside in the absence of good mentor figures who can offer guidance through the hero's journey. Parks (Chapter 23, this volume) offers a more thorough discussion of these and other impediments to heroic action. We now turn our attention to the importance of influence from various sources of transformation.

### *Source: Internal or External*

We distinguish between sources of transformative change that come from within the individual and sources that originate from outside the individual. We have identified four *internal* sources of transformation. First, transformation can be a byproduct of stages of natural human development. An initial transformative event, a sperm cell fertilizing an egg, leads to a zygote transforming into an embryo, which then becomes (in order) a fetus, a baby, a toddler, a child, an adolescent, a young adult, a mid-life adult, and an elderly adult. Accompanying these physical developments are stages of transformative growth in areas of emotion (Trentacosts & Izard, 2006), morality (Kohlberg, 1969; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987), spirituality (Bradbury, 2010), sociability (Erikson, 1994), and various forms of intelligence (Piaget & Inhelder, 1958).

A second internal source of change resides in people's needs and goals. From the perspective of Maslow's (1943) pyramid of needs, an individual is motivated to fulfill the needs at a particular level once lower level needs are satisfied. Once the needs at the four lower levels are satisfied, one is no longer concerned with them or driven by them. In effect, one transitions to higher levels and eventually achieves self-actualization, during which one might enjoy *peak experiences* of having discovered meaning, beauty, truth, and a sense of oneness with the world. Self-actualization has a sort of self-centered mysticism to it. One feels whole, enhanced, and connected. It is also the case that one's needs and motives can shift naturally over time or in response to changes in one's life circumstances. For example, research has found that people who undergo a battle with a deadly disease will undergo a change in their needs, goals, and choice of heroes. This idea of need-based heroism is part of Allison and Goethals' (2014, 2016) *heroic leadership dynamic* (HLD). The HLD explains why people who are fighting cancer will choose new heroes who have successfully overcome the same cancer, why people who play football tend to choose famous football players as heroes and why, whimsically, people who undergo painful divorce may choose King Henry VIII as their hero. As our needs change, transformative role models help us transform ourselves thereby helping us meet our newfound needs.

A third internal source of transformative change is human transgression and failure. People often undergo significant change after being humbled by their "fallings and failings" (Rohr, 2011, p. xv). Joseph Campbell (2004) acknowledged that not all heroic quests end with glorious, heroic success. "There is always the possibility for a fiasco," he said (p. 133). Such fiascos can serve as the grist for a larger transformative mill, producing a kind of suffering needed to fuel a greater hero journey. It is a general truth that for substance abusers to be sufficiently motivated to seek recovery from their addictions, they must reach a profound level of pain and suffering. This state is commonly referred to as "hitting rock bottom." Suffering, according to Rohr (2011), "doesn't accomplish anything tangible but creates space for learning and love" (p. 68). This space has been called *liminal space* (van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1966), defined as the transitional space between one state of being and an entirely different state of being. In liminal space, one has been stripped of one's previous life, humbled, and silenced. Transgressions, and the liminal space that follows them, are the fertile soil from which heroic transformations may bloom.

Finally, a fourth internal source of transformation is what we call an enlightened dawning of responsibility. This dawning is captured in a simple phrase, composed of ten two-letter words, "If it is to be, it is up to me" (Phipps, 2011). There is a long history of social psychological work devoted to studying the forces at work that undermine the dawning of responsibility in emergency settings (Latane & Darley, 1969). Research has shown that in a crisis a small but courageous minority of people do step up to do the right thing even when there are strong pressures to avoid assuming responsibility. These fearless social aberrants, most of whom are ordinary citizens, are able to transcend their circumstances and transform from ordinary to extraordinary. Whistleblowers are a notable example; they demonstrate the mettle to step up and do right thing at great potential cost to themselves (Brown, Chapter 19, this volume; Lewis, Brown, & Moberly, 2014). Bystander training is now available to cultivate this dawning of responsibility in situations where transformative leadership is needed (Brown, 2015).

In sum, the four internal factors that elicit transformative change are natural development, needs and goals, transgression, and the dawning of responsibility. We next turn our attention to four *external* situational forces that can evoke transformative change. Situations, for example, can trigger emotional responses that transform us. William James (1902/2013) noted that in the context of religious conversion, "emotional occasions ... are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements" (p. 77). Emotions need not be negative to induce change. The recently identified emotion of *elevation* can transform people psychologically and behaviorally (Haidt, 2003). People feel elevated after witnessing a morally beautiful act, and this elevated feeling has been shown to produce altruistic acts (Thomson & Siegel, 2013). Similarly, feelings of awe and wonder can be invoked by reading hero mythology (Campbell, 2004) and by viewing spectacular images of natural beauty. Awe and wonder have also been shown to be associated with prosocial behavior (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, & Keltner, 2015). Moreover, empathic feelings have attracted considerable research attention, with dozens of studies demonstrating that exposure to the suffering of others can induce empathy. Empathy, like awe and wonder, can also have a positive, transformative effect on altruistic responses (Williams, O'Driscoll, & Moore, 2014).

A second external source of transformation is the series of trials that all heroes must undergo during their journey. We have referred to suffering as an internal cause of transformation when it results from self-destructive actions, but suffering caused by outside forces can serve as an external source of transformation. Campbell (1988) believed that "trials are designed to see to it that the intending hero should be really a hero. Is he really a match for this task?" (p. 154). The point of greatest danger for the hero is when she enters the *belly of the whale* (Campbell, 1949). The belly can be entered literally as in stories of Jonah and Pinocchio, but usually the belly is a metaphorical place along the journey in which the hero's darkest inner-demons must be "disempowered, overcome, and controlled" (p. 180). For Campbell, the hero's journey truly is an inner task of conquering one's fears and slaying one's dragons. In the sixteenth century, Saint John of the Cross referred to this ultimate trial as the *Dark Night of the Soul*, which describes a state of spiritual desolation that we are called to overcome and is at the heart of the road to enlightenment (Johnson, 1991). Positive psychologists today refer to this transformative process as post-traumatic growth, during which people convert the worst thing that ever happened to them into the best (Rendon, 2015).

A third external source of transformation is the vast hero literature and mythology to which we are exposed throughout our lives. We have argued elsewhere (Allison & Goethals, 2014, 2016) that narratives about heroes, pervasive in all of storytelling from Gilgamesh to the present day, serve as a nourishing catalyst for transformative change. The central premise of the HLD is that our consumption of heroic tales takes place within an interactive system or process that is energizing, always in motion, and drawing us toward rising heroes and repelling us from falling ones. The HLD framework proposes two transformative functions of hero stories: an *epistemic* function and an *energizing* function. Hero narratives supply epistemic growth by offering scripts

for prosocial action, by revealing fundamental truths about human existence, by unpacking life paradoxes, and by cultivating emotional intelligence. The epistemic value of hero tales is revealed in Campbell's (1988) observation that hero mythology offers insights into "what can be known but not told" (p. 206) and that "mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation to life and death" (Campbell, 2002, p. 34). The second transformative function of hero tales, focusing on their energizing benefits, provides people with agency and efficacy. Hero narratives promote moral elevation, heal psychic wounds, and inspire psychological growth (Allison & Goethals, 2016).

The fourth external source of transformation is the social environment of the hero. In hero narratives and classic mythology, the hero's journey is populated by numerous friends, companions, lovers, parent figures, and mentors who assist the hero on her quest. We explore these social sources of transformation in greater detail below.

## Social Sources of Transformation

In his original treatment of the hero's monomyth, Joseph Campbell (1949) detailed the multi-layered social landscape of the hero's journey. The hero is always helped along the journey by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others. These latter instances involving imagined or implied assistance are rare in storytelling, but they do crop up in stories of lone survival as seen in movies such as *Gravity*, *Cast Away*, *Life of Pi*, and *All is Lost*. Actual encounters with social entities are far more common in hero tales. During the journey, the hero will befriend people, or creatures, who represent qualities that she lacks and must acquire to triumph on her quest. A notable example is Dorothy's encounter with the scarecrow, tin man, and lion, who represent the brain, heart, and courage that Dorothy lacks in *The Wizard of Oz*. Sidekicks are another common source of support for heroes, as featured in the Lone Ranger and Tonto, Batman and Robin, and Han Solo and Chewbacca. Campbell (1949) also discussed the importance of encounters with parental figures; male heroes seek atonement with father figures, and female heroes with mother figures. Campbell also described the hero's brush with lovers and temptresses, who can either assist, distract, or do harm to the hero.

One of the most essential social events of the hero's journey is the arrival of the mentor figure. In classic myth, the mentor is often a magical outsider, an elder, an exotic person or creature whom one would least expect to possess the wisdom needed for the hero to succeed. According to Campbell (2004), the mentor "may be some little wood sprite or wise man or fairy godmother or animal that comes to you as a companion or as an advisor, letting you know what the dangers are along the way and how to overcome them" (p. 116). The majority of people who are asked to name their heroes mention a mentor or coach who had a transformative effect on them (Allison & Goethals, 2011). As legendary football coach Tom Landry observed, a mentor is someone "who tells you what you don't want to hear, who has you see what you don't want to see, so you can be who you have always known you could be" (Farcht, 2007, p. 294). Famous mentors in hero tales include Merlin the Magician giving King Arthur the knowledge to rule England, Yoda helping Luke Skywalker defeat Darth Vader, and Mr. Miyagi training the Karate Kid. Good mentors equip the hero with what she needs, but there can also be bad mentors who steer the hero down a dark path of self-destruction (Allison & Smith, 2015). Examples of dark mentors include the serpent in Genesis 3:4, Sauron in *Lord of the Rings*, Terence Fletcher in *Whiplash*, and Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*.

The temporal sequencing of mentorship is an important element of the hero's journey. Mentors help heroes become transformed, and later, having succeeded on their journeys, these transformed heroes then assume the role of mentor for others who are at earlier stages of their quests. In short, "transformed people transform people" (Rohr, 2014, p. 263). Mentors can have a transformative effect with their words of advice, with their actions, or both. Words can fall on deaf ears but one's actions, attitudes, and lifestyle can leave a lasting imprint. St. Francis of Assisi

conveyed it this way: "You must preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary use words" (Rohr, 2014, p. 263). Many people consider Wesley Autrey, New York's subway hero, to be a mentor figure, not from anything he said but from his one bold, selfless act of saving a man who had fallen on the tracks before an oncoming train (Allison & Goethals, 2013). A mentor can be viewed as a type of hero who enhances the lives of others (Kinsella, Ritchie, & Igou, 2015).

Inasmuch as mentorship is a type of leadership, one could say that the hero's journey prepares people for leadership roles by offering a transformative experience that can be shared later with others. Burns (1978) argued that transforming leaders make an effort to satisfy followers' lower needs (e.g., survival and safety), thereby elevating them for the important work that they—leaders and followers—must do together to produce significant higher-level changes. Burns described transforming leadership as individuals engaging each other "in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Both leaders and followers will be "elevated" such that the leaders create a "new cadre of leaders" (p. 20). This conception is consistent with Campbell's ideas about the role of mentorship during the hero's journey, with the mentor elevating the hero and preparing her for future mentoring duties. Burns' framework also makes explicit a notion that is largely implicit in Maslow's (1943) model, namely, that the self-actualized person has become an elder, a mentor figure, and a moral actor who wields transformative influence over others. Erik Erikson's (1994) theory of lifelong development makes the similar claim that older *generative* individuals, having been given so much early in life, are now in a position to give back to younger people.

Other theories also point to the transformative effect of mentoring and leadership. Hollander (1995) has proposed a two-way influence relationship between a leader and followers aimed primarily at attaining mutual goals. Hollander defined leadership as "a shared experience, a voyage through time" with the leader in partnership with followers to pursue common interests. For Hollander, "a major component of the leader-follower relationship is the leader's perception of his or her self relative to followers, and how they in turn perceive the leader" (p. 55). Tyler and Lind (1992) have shown that these perceptions are critically important in cementing good follower loyalty. Followers will perceive a leader as a "legitimate" authority when she adheres to basic principles of procedural justice. Leaders who show fairness, respect, and concern for the needs of followers are able to build followers' self-esteem, a pivotal step in Maslow's (1943) pyramid, thereby fostering followers' transformative movement toward meeting higher-level needs.

Mentors and leaders can also use their charisma to exert a transformative effect on their followers. Goethals and Allison (2014) reviewed the transforming leadership of three heroic leaders from the twentieth century whom they dubbed "the three kings": Muhammad Ali, Elvis Presley, and Martin Luther King, Jr. These kings radiated powerful charisma that transformed their followers. All three kings had exceptional personas. All three made an emotional connection with their audiences. All three related and embodied compelling stories. All three enacted theatrical leadership that gave people what they wanted and needed. Two of them, King and Ali, used words, delivered in riveting styles, often touching on religious precepts, to influence their followers' thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The three kings used their charisma to transform others, through both their words and their example.

We conclude this section on social sources of transformation with a brief discussion of divine sources. The human tendency to anthropomorphize their deities, as in Christian references to "Father" and "Son," suggests a social component to faith-based transformation. Heroes from classic mythology and contemporary hero narratives are often transformed by a god, higher power, or supernatural force. William James (1902/2013) was the first scholar to record systematic observations of divinely inspired transformations. He described five transformative effects of believing in a higher power. First, people experience a serenity characterized by "peace," "harmony," and "the loss of all worry." Second, there is "the sense of perceiving truths

not known before” with “the mysteries of life” becoming “lucid.” Third, there is “an appearance of newness,” a freshness of perception that “beautifies every object.” Fourth, people enjoy immense feelings of subjective well-being, an “ecstasy of happiness,” “love,” and “joy.” Finally, people experience a feeling of deep connection to others and to nature, “of being in a wider life than that of this world’s selfish little interests” (James, 1902/2013, pp. 86–89). Members of 12-step recovery programs are asked to develop a belief in a higher power, as described in the second step, to experience the beneficial, healing effects that William James described. Step 12 even refers to a “spiritual awakening” that members undergo, often described as a transformation of the mind, body, and spirit. Regular attendance at 12-Step meetings is also essential to recovery; there can be no awakening or transformation without face-to-face contact with other members, a fact that underscores the importance of the social basis of transformation.

## Hero Characteristics: Pre and Post-Transformation

Early in the hero’s journey, the yet-to-be transformed hero is missing one or more important inner qualities that are necessary to triumph on the quest and deliver the boon to society. As Campbell (1988) notes, the pre-transformed hero is an incomplete individual who embarks on the hero’s journey “either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir” (p. 152). Our review of the literature on transformation reveals three missing pieces of the neophyte hero who must suffer some sort of death of her former self in order to be reborn into “a richer” and “mature condition” (p. 152). The untransformed hero is missing (1) a sociocentric view of life; (2) an autonomy from the “patho-adolescent culture” in which humans have always lived; and (3) a mindset of growth and change. We note that the route to transformation, requiring the acquisition of these three qualities, bears a striking similarity to Maslow’s (1943) pathway to self-actualization, Erikson’s (1994) eight-stage model of socio-emotional development, and many other conceptualizations of social, spiritual, and emotional growth (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1969; Levinson, 1986; Plotkin, 2007; Rohr, 2011).

### *Egocentricity to Sociocentricity*

According to Campbell (1988), “when we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness” (p. 155). Campbell (2004) believed that one of the central functions of hero mythology is to “get a sense of everything—yourself, your society, the universe, and the mystery beyond—as one great unit” (p. 55). Richard Rohr (2011) calls this “the unified field,” borrowing a phrase from Albert Einstein, who sought a unified theory that could explain the entire physical universe. Poet Annie Dillard (2013) described this unified field as “our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here” (p. 9). In most hero narratives, the hero begins the journey disconnected from the world. She is a self-centered, prideful individual whose sole preoccupation is establishing her identity, her career, and her material world. The entire point of her hero journey is to awaken her to the larger, deeper task of thinking beyond herself, to developing communion with everyone and with everything.

Not all human cultures emphasize this connective journey to an equal degree. There is a notable “dichotomy of the egocentric *west* versus the sociocentric *rest*” (Johnson, 2003, p. 91), suggesting that a journey toward sociocentric transformation may be more needed, and therefore more pervasive, in hero tales of Western societies. Still, one encounters deep elements of sociocentric transformation woven in the fabric of Eastern societies. For example, in Buddhism, the *bodhicitta* refers to an awakened mind “that inspires a promise, a vow to advance step by step to help others” (Mercer, 2016). The Bohisattva is an enlightened hero who, through a disciplined path of awakening, acquires an understanding of *dana* (generosity), *sila* (morality), *ksanti*

(patience), *virya* (effort), *samadhi* (meditative calm and insight), and *prajna* (wisdom). Doing the right thing becomes effortless and rewarding. Taoist traditions, moreover, view enlightenment as the acquisition of communication, communion and connection with all people and all of nature.

A number of philosophers and spiritual thinkers have distinguished between *dualistic* thinking and *nondualistic* thinking (e.g., Carreira, 2014; Culliford, 2010; Rohr, 2011; Wilber, 2007). The dualistic mind dichotomizes people, things, and ideas, and it is the dominant mode of thinking for the pre-transformed hero. It is “either-or” thinking. In contrast, the nondualistic mind bathes in the mindset of inclusivity; it is “both-and” thinking. Rohr (2011) describes the dualistic mind as wedded to the *seven C's of delusion*: “it compares, it competes, it conflicts, it conspires, it condemns, it cancels out any contrary evidence, and it then crucifies with impunity” (p. 147). Dualistic thinking works for most of us when we are young, carving out our identities and establishing boundaries between “good” versus “bad, and “us” versus “them.” Howard Gardner (1995) refers to this thinking style as that of a 5-year-old child, a style that unfortunately many of us never outgrow. For the hero to become unified with the world—the end state of Campbell's (1949) monomyth—dualistic thinking must lead to some type of “falling” or a “failing,” setting the stage for transformation toward nondualistic thinking. “The rational mind stresses opposites,” wrote Campbell (1991). “Compassion and love go beyond pairs of opposites” (p. 197). Hero mythology does not promote the rational; it promotes the *transrational*, which “transcends all categories of thought” (p. 41) and points to “a breakthrough of the reality of this life [when] you realize that you and that other are, in fact, one” (p. 54).

The journey toward the discovery of the one-ness of humanity may not be a far leap from our natural inborn inclination. Kylie Hamlin & Karen Wynn's (2011) work on infants shows that even newborns express a preference for morally good individuals over selfish ones. Additional research demonstrates that there is a strong genetic basis for performing behaviors aimed at civic engagement and other pro-social causes (Dawes, Settle, Loewen, McGue, & Iacono, 2015). To the extent that we spend the first stages of our lives selfishly building our personal identities and careers, we may be designed to awaken in later stages to our original predisposition toward sociocentricity (Rohr, 2011). Campbell (2001) urged us all to cultivate this greater purpose of forming compassionate unification with all of humanity. He believed this awakening is the central function of hero mythology.

### *Dependency to Autonomy*

Our western culture's preoccupation with safety, security, socioeconomic well-being, and entertainment has led some observers to call the culture “patho-adolescent” (Plotkin, 2007; Rohr, 2011; West, 2008). Much of this patho-adolescence no doubt stems from people's behavior and identity being steeped in consumerism, materialism, competition, violence, and nationalism. Rigid adherence to dualistic thinking may play a role in the maintenance of this culture, but the adolescence goes beyond thinking style to include a misguided belief that the lower-level needs in Maslow's hierarchy are the only needs that ever matter. A person's willingness to deviate from the dominant cultural pattern is essential for heroic transformation. Heroes do the right thing, and do what they must do, regardless of authority, tradition, and consequence. Maslow (1943) called this characteristic *autonomy*. “There are the ‘strong’ people,” wrote Maslow, “who can easily weather disagreement or opposition, who can swim against the stream of public opinion and who can stand up for the truth at great personal cost” (p. 379). Fulfillment of the lower needs in the pyramid is essential for autonomy to develop in individuals. “People who have been made secure and strong in the earliest years tend to remain secure and strong thereafter in the face of whatever threatens” (p. 380).

The world's greatest heroes have been fearless in their autonomy. Jesus of Nazareth was a revolutionary who defied the conventions of his culture and then paid the ultimate price. Other



similar examples are Martin Luther King, Jr., Joan of Arc, Malcolm X, Harvey Milk, and Mahatma Gandhi (Wolf & Zuckerman, 2012). Phil Zimbardo has championed the idea that heroes are people with the ability to resist social pressures that promote evil, and that such resistance requires the moral courage to be guided by one's heart rather than by social cues. Zimbardo and other hero activists drive home the point that "the opposite of a hero isn't a villain; it's a bystander" (Chakraborty, 2010; see also The Hero Construction Company, [www.thehero.cc.com](http://www.thehero.cc.com)). While the transformed hero enjoys "union with the world," she remains an autonomous individual who can establish her own path in the world that is unfettered by the patho-adolescence all around her. "What a man can be, he *must* be," wrote Maslow (p. 376), expressing an idea consistent with Campbell's (1991) advice to "Follow your bliss" (p. 22). Each of us, according to Campbell (2004), has a unique heroic gift to offer the world, and our life purpose is to conquer our dragons at all costs to find that gift. We do not find our bliss by following a trail blazed by others. Instead, "you enter the forest at the darkest point, where there is no path. Where there's a way or path, it is someone else's path; each human being is a unique phenomenon" (p. xxvi).

### *Stagnation to Growth*

One can be autonomous but not necessarily growing and stretching toward realizing one's full potential. The hero must leave home and venture on the journey to obliterate a status quo that is no longer working. Earlier we discussed the reluctant hero, the person who does not choose to change but is cast onto the hero track as a result of "fallings," "failings," or life-altering circumstances beyond her control. The pre-transformed hero naturally resists change, and thus severe setbacks may be her only impetus to budge. Without a prod, she will remain comfortable in her stagnation, oblivious to the idea that anything needs changing. This obliviousness, and how it is remedied, reflects an important mythic archetype. Fables and fairy tales abound that tell of heroes with a form of amnesia about their true identity. The hero is a person who lacks awareness of her special heritage, her exceptional pedigree. The whole point of the narrative is to demonstrate how, after many arduous trials, she is able to discover her true special nature. We see this pattern in tales of kings and princesses who are oblivious about their royal birthright, and the story centers on how they go about reclaiming that birthright. This narrative of amnesia has had lasting appeal because it speaks to all of us. Every individual, as we have noted, has hidden heroic gifts that beg for discovery.

The hero's journey has been referred to as the death of the false self and the birth of the true self (Rohr, 2011; Sperry, 2011). The false self is one's identity, possessions, and career that one has spent the first half of life building at great cost. Spiritual masters assert that whereas the false self consists of those aspects of the self that are temporary constructions designed to feed the ego, the true self is eternal. One's true self is the spirit or soul, or "the face you had before you were born" (Hori, 2000). The hero's journey marks the death of pretense and inauthenticity, and the birth of the person one is meant to be. Campbell (1988) described the process as "killing the infantile ego and bringing forth an adult" (p. 168). Sperry (2011) has argued that people are so attached to their false selves that they fear the death of the false self even more than they fear the death of their physical self. Our growth can also be inhibited by a phenomenon called the crab bucket syndrome (Simmons, 2012). This syndrome describes the consequences of our entrenchment with our families, our friends, and our communities, and they with us. Any attempt we make to crawl up and out of the bucket is met with failure as the crabs below us pull us back down. For most of us, the hero's journey represents the best way, and perhaps the only way, to escape the bucket and discover our true selves.

As we transform, we need not abandon our old selves in their entirety. Recall that the transformed, nondualistic hero holds a view of the world that *transcends and includes*. This holistic

view of one's self and one's values is reflected in Jung's mandala as a creative tension of opposites and as a celebration, and embracing, of one's complexity. Campbell (1991) argued that a healthy, transformed individual accepts and embraces her growth and contradictions. "The psychological transformation," wrote Campbell, "would be that whatever was formerly endured is now known, loved, and served" (p. 207).

## Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has reviewed the causes, processes, dimensions, and consequences of the hero's transformation. Admittedly, our treatment of these issues has emphasized breadth at the expense of depth, as surely an entire book could be devoted to each of many issues we have raised. Tales of heroic transformations have moved human beings for countless centuries, first via the oral tradition before the advent of written language and then later in plays, novels, and cinema. William James once observed, "Whenever one aim grows so stable as to expel definitively its previous rivals from an individual's life, we tend to speak of the phenomenon, and even *wonder* at it, as a transformation" (James, 1902/2013, p. 70, italics added). James' use of the word "wonder" implies that people are moved by the transformations they see in people, and also that these transformation are a rare occurrence. As did James, we suspect that many people spend their entire lives resisting change, denying the need for it, and suffering as a result of avoiding it (Allison & Setterberg, 2016). As Jung (1945) observed, "There is no coming to consciousness without pain. People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious" (p. 335).

Those who dare to transform, or who are compelled to do so by circumstance, grow into fully developed human beings ready, willing, and able to transform others. The transformed hero represents the pinnacle of human maturity, the state of well-being that allows people to flourish (Seligman, 2011b) and experience eudaimonia (Franco, Efthimiou, & Zimbardo, in press). For Buddhists, the highest state of enlightenment is *nirvana*, a state of bliss when one is reborn into a new life and free from all suffering. For Hindus, this ultimate state of bliss is *ananda*, and for Muslims it is *taqwa*. Peterson and Seligman (2004) surveyed cultures from around the globe and identified 24 universal character strengths that describe the healthiest and most mature human beings worldwide. These character strengths were then grouped into six character virtues: *wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence*. The six virtues closely match Campbell's (1949) description of the transformed hero. As a result of their journey, heroes acquire wisdom about themselves and the world; they develop the courage to face their inner dragons; they are in union with all of humanity; they pursue justice even at a cost to themselves; they are humbled and tempered; and they embark on a journey that "opens the world so that it becomes transparent to something that is beyond speech, beyond words, in short, to what we call transcendence" (Campbell, 2014, p. 40).

A promising new direction for research is now unfolding in our understanding of the biological and genetic bases of heroic transformation (Efthimiou, 2015). Recent research has shown that there are more dopamine receptors in risk-takers and far-travelers than in risk-avoiders and homebodies (Dreber, Rand, Wernerfelt, Garcia, Lum, & Zeckhauser, 2011). This finding suggests that a predisposition to venture forth on the hero's journey may be built into some people's systems. There may also be genetic markers for novelty seeking and risk-taking (Thomson, Hanna, Carlson, & Rupert, 2012). Research is also beginning to explore the embodiment of heroism, demonstrating the reciprocal influence of mind and body in producing heroic action (Efthimiou, 2015). Campbell (1988) seems to have anticipated this work, observing that hero myths "were designed to harmonize the mind and the body" (p. 87). Hero myths contain symbolic, metaphorical images representing "the energies of the organs of the body in conflict with each other ... The brain is one of the organs" (p. 46).

Our understanding of heroic transformation should be enhanced by the newly emerging transdisciplinary approach to heroism (Allison, 2015; Efthimiou, 2016; Efthimiou, Chapter 8, this volume; Efthimiou & Allison, 2016). This approach emphasizes a holistic perspective that integrates the social and physical sciences within a humanities context. Again, Campbell (1969) understood the significance of an emerging science that incorporates multiple disciplinarity. He conjectured that hero mythology has “succeeded in creating for the human species an environment of sign stimuli that release physical responses” such as joy, anger, tears, pain, and impulsivity. Consequently, “the biology, psychology, sociology, and history of these sign stimuli may be said to constitute the field of our subject, the science of Comparative Mythology” (p. 41). In his book on “happiness genes,” Baird (2010) reviews evidence suggesting that we can change our ancestral, evolutionary wiring to a more evolved state. Based on this research, Efthimiou (personal communication, August 1, 2015) speculates that people’s aspirations and preparations for doing heroic work can produce surprising concomitant physical benefits. The process of undergoing rigorous hero training “from beginner to intermediate to proficient” could change “our very cellular structure in the process.” In short, Efthimiou views heroism as “embodied skill acquisition—something that is embedded and embodied in our very being.”

Another ripe area for future research resides in the phenomenon of malignant transformation. Villainous embodied transformation has been demonstrated by Gray (2010) who found that merely thinking about harming another person significantly increased participants’ physical strength. Campbell (1988) explained villainy in terms of an inability to bring one’s deepest dragons and inner gifts into conscious awareness. He speculated that “consciousness thinks it’s running the shop. But it’s a secondary organ of a total human being, and it must not put itself in control. It must submit and serve the humanity of the body.” If a person “doesn’t listen to the demands of his own heart,” then he is doomed to villainy (p. 181). Allison and Smith (2015) discuss the many ways that heroes and villains differ in their transformations. Both heroes and villains are wounded in some way, but only heroes find ways to heal the wounds, even when the damage appears irreparable. Heroes transcend difficult circumstances; villains succumb to them. Heroes, moreover, discover their missing inner quality and become transformed. Villains, however, never discover that quality and either stagnate or regress. Heroes attract benevolent mentors; villains either never get mentored or attract dark mentors. Heroes usually participate in all aspects of their journey; villains often “outsource” parts of their journey to henchmen or minions. Finally, heroes are on a journey of becoming in union with the world, whereas villains are on a journey of separation from the world. Malignant transformation has been discussed at length by Zimbardo (2008), who calls it the *Lucifer Effect*.

Campbell (2004) asserted that “a good life is one hero journey after another” (p.133). The wisdom of writers and philosophers, from Homer in 800 BCE to Phil Zimbardo, tells us that we are all called to lead a heroic life. Yet most people are unaware of this fact, or they face impediments that thwart the realization of their heroic potential. If the ultimate goal of the hero’s journey is for the hero to bestow the world with transformative gifts, then one would think that the world would be doing everything possible to promote hero’s journeys for everyone. Service to others appears to be both the means of achieving personal transformation as well as the consequence of transformation. Kok et al. (2013) found that the practice of loving kindness toward others had positive transformative effects on participants’ physiology, and Jenkins et al. (2013) discovered that volunteering to help others is associated with lower depression and lower mortality. Indeed, the best way to transform oneself may be to transform others. Joseph Campbell urged us to “follow your bliss,” and ultimately the hero transformation is as much about creating bliss for others as it is for oneself.

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